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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

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Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN 32 COUNTRIES/AREAS
SINCE JANUARY 1, 1978

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ARGENTINA

Despite noteworthy positive steps taken since January 1, serious violations of fundamental rights persist. The frequency of such abuses is liable to diminish over time. The process, however, will be protracted, reflecting both the military's perception of terrorist strength and the ability of the Videla-led moderates to impose their preferred policies.

Positive human rights developments have included:

- publication between February 3 and April 18 of a composite list of the names of 3,336 state-of-siege (PEN) prisoners, very few of whom had previously been categorized as "disappeared;"
- an apparent decline in the rate of disappearances between January and April;
- an effort by government authorities to curtail and control counterterrorist abuses; military, clandestine, and other sources have reported efforts to regularize detention procedures, punish and discipline security officials guilty of abuses, demilitarize the police, and retrain and reassign military personnel involved in counterterrorist operations;
- the success of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in gaining full, private access to political prisoners, including prisoners whose detention has not been acknowledged by the government. (The ICRC also has the right to make repeat visits and aid the families of detainees);
- implementation of a restricted right-of-option program that allows PEN detainees to petition for exile; bureaucratic problems and the lack of internal cooperation from some officials opposed to the program have slowed its progress and fewer than 50 persons had left the country as of June 8;
- discussion of conditions for an Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) visit between Argentine leaders and IAHRC officials. The IAHRC requested permission to visit in February. In mid-June, the Argentines issued an invitation unacceptable to the IAHRC. Negotiations are continuing, and several highly-placed Argentines have stated their expectation that an accommodation will be reached;

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- recision on June 5 of two decrees that limited press freedom; and
- responsive action on cases of special interest to the US; e.g., Jacobo Timerman, Guillermo Vogler, the Deutschs, and Alfredo Bravo.

On the negative side:

- There is no indication that security personnel have changed or intend to change their abusive tactics in dealing with hardcore terrorists (as opposed to low-level operatives or support personnel with no involvement in or direct responsibility for bloodshed.) A generally reliable clandestine source reported that senior army commanders decided in late March to continue using the same methods employed during the previous two years; i.e., clandestine detention, severe interrogation--including torture, and summary execution of those judged to be "irrecuperable." No substantial military sector is known to dispute this approach to hardcore terrorists.
- There are about 500 prisoners being held without official acknowledgment, according to Embassy sources.
- Prisoner mistreatment remains a problem. Once they are officially recognized as PEN detainees, prisoners usually are not physically abused. However, torture probably remains widespread during interrogations (prior to PEN listing). Well-informed sources report that physical mistreatment is a problem during prisoner transfers between jails, just prior to the release of some detainees, and at the La Plata detention facility.
- There are five reasonably documented cases of prisoners being released at La Plata only to be immediately murdered or kidnapped, presumably by security personnel.
- Selected religious groups continue to be harrassed. The Jehovah's Witnesses are the main victim. However, the February decree requiring the registration of all religious groups apparently has not been implemented. Jewish and Protestant leaders stated in mid-March that they did not view the decree as a threat to religious freedom.

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